

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Today's emotions = Tomorrow's performance

Imagine for a moment we stopped seeing our emotions as weakness or simply something we need to control. What if every emotion you are currently feeling as you read these words on this page is intelligence to help you navigate life?

What would happen if we stopped ignoring this internal intelligence system that has evolved over thousands of years to help us grow?

Hello, and welcome to my new book! This book will explain how today's emotions are tomorrow's performance.

Before I introduce myself, I thought it would be useful to share a simple four-step guide for your journey through the book.

Guide 1: The Starting Point

We all need to face some key truths before we're able to make real change:

- Every organization in the world has unhappy employees.
- Every single human being has happiness levels that fluctuate.
- No company will ever have happy employees all the time.
- It is not healthy or realistic for human beings to be happy all the time.

Guide 2: Toxic Positivity and Perfection

This book is not about toxic positivity, perfection, or shoving happiness memes or tropes down your throat until you believe them. You can't simply "think" yourself into happiness. A positive outlook in life is a handy tool—research proves how

handy it is. However, this is not a positive psychology book. There are already loads of them (of varying quality).

The Happiness Index is not called *The “High” Happiness Index* for a reason. It is called an index because information from the highs and lows is equally important.

I have never met a perfect company or a leader who makes 100% spot-on decisions all the time. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for a thriving culture, but there is data and insight that can help guide us all.

Our organization—The Happiness Index—and our customers struggle with all the factors we discuss in this book just as much as everyone else. However, having the data and insight I am about to share as a guiding light helps us improve our decision-making.

As a reader myself, when I pick up a book, I hope I’ll learn the one perfect answer that I can take away and apply to my organization. Unfortunately, the world doesn’t work like that. Like you, we at The Happiness Index don’t get it right all the time, but we are able to make more informed decisions due to our data.

The starting point is that we must embrace all our feelings and thoughts to thrive.

Guide 3: Use-By Date

This book is about understanding the latest science, data, and research that drives employee engagement and happiness in the workplace so organizations can create the conditions for their employees to thrive and therefore their organizations to succeed.

The Happiness Index has measured the happiness levels of over two million human beings. However, the minute we collected that data it was out of date. That doesn't mean we can't learn from that data, but no data set that complex is ever going to be simple.

People love data because it can be used as fact. I don't see data as fact. I simply see it as what happened in one moment in time. Please use the data and research in this book to "make better decisions" not to "make decisions." Data is there to inform and help guide us.

Guide 4: Creating a Thriving Culture Takes Hard Work

There is no simple shortcut to a thriving culture. Employee happiness is a two-way street—it requires employees and organizations to contribute for it to work.

This book is for organizations that want to stop just saying their "people are their greatest asset" and start proving it. This book aims to give you a starting point and help guide you when creating a thriving workplace culture.

With those four guiding points established, let's all take a deep breath and relax into the book.

MY NAME IS MATT

Although this is my second book (my other book is *Freedom to Be Happy: The Business Case for Happiness*), I don't really see myself as an author. Although the words you are reading right now are written by me to you, the reader, I primarily see my role as your guide to help navigate what we have learned.

This book showcases amazing scientists, HR professionals, CEOs, professors, data scientists, practitioners, and storytellers,

who all deserve huge credit for adding their unique perspectives to this story.

For some, data and research can be a dry subject. But thanks to the flair, passion, and research of the experts in this book, I'm able to bring the subject of employee engagement and happiness alive in a way that feels real and usable.

Today I am simply your tour guide who has pulled this book together for you while doing my two other jobs, the best and second-best jobs in the world:

- I am a dad.
- I work in happiness.

I do the morning school run five days a week, so by the time I start my normal workday I can be pretty flustered (well, full-on knackered, if I'm being completely honest). It's the best and worst part of my day. Doing the school run is one of my non-negotiables in my career and is a big part of my happiness.

It might sound odd that one of the most important things that drives my happiness also makes me feel stressed. The ancient Greeks would have understood my duality of emotions. They broke happiness down into what they called *eudaimonia* and *hedonism*.

EUDAIMONIA AND HEDONISM

Eudaimonia is that underlying, consistent feeling in life that you are happy or unhappy (the part of the school run that makes me happy). *Hedonism* or joy is the part of life that fluctuates daily with the ebbs and flows of life (in my life the part of the school run that can be stressful). These different feelings are a very normal part of being a living and breathing human being.

So although the school run does not necessarily bring me joy, it does bring me what I would describe as underlying life happiness.

Joy is supposed to go up and down like a healthy heartbeat. We are not programmed to live life in a constant state of joy or in a constant state of sadness. Your child forgetting their lunchbox and then having a tantrum in the middle of the street is not necessarily going to bring you joy.

Interestingly, many academics who have been guests on my podcast, “Happiness and Humans,” prefer the term *subjective well-being* to *happiness*. It has been politely explained to me that happiness and subjective well-being are used interchangeably in research when referring to happiness. I am also told that subjective well-being is preferred because it helps their research be taken more seriously by governments and the people who award funding to universities (keep that one a secret between us).

In my last book, *Freedom to Be Happy: The Business Case for Happiness*, I comprehensively explored the concept that happiness is a pretty serious business metric, so we are not going to make a business case for happiness again in this book. As I write this, there are approximately 5,561 research papers on employee happiness and 218,000 on employee engagement, so around 223,561 incredibly rich sources of information.

If you still have doubts about happiness being a real metric, please check out *Freedom to Be Happy*, and read about how happier employees are more productive, more creative, sell more, and create better financial outcomes for their organizations.

I'm going to assume you are not applying for an academic research grant, so for the remainder of our journey, I will now simply refer to that normal up-and-down daily feeling we all experience every single day as *joy* and that underlying feeling of our happiness as *happiness*.

When I am not with family and friends, you can find me at The Happiness Index as co-CEO of the organization I co-founded in 2014. Its goal is to measure employee engagement, employee happiness, and organizational culture.

I love my job—I actually do.

Introducing This Book

So why a second book? Never say *never*.

After saying I would “probably *never* write another book again” at the book launch of *Freedom to Be Happy*, I have written another book.

Why?

I wrote my first book in the middle of a pandemic. Now, as we move into a new era, the world has changed forever. Many leaders moved into their senior roles at a pre-pandemic point in history. They have an experience bias based on a pre-pandemic world, a past and a reality that—unless Marty McFly and Doc Brown are going to knock on your door—is not coming back.

Right now, we have a unique opportunity to change the world, but there is simply not enough information to help organizations make informed decisions. Let me correct myself—there is enough research; it is all just hidden in plain sight beneath thousands of Google searches.

When under pressure, human beings go back to what they know best. The past can be a cozy, safe space that makes us feel comfortable. Nostalgia is an incredibly powerful force that can have both positive and negative outcomes on all our lives. Comfort is a nice feeling, but if we stay in our comfort zones for too long, we can lose opportunities to grow.

I wrote this book to share happiness and engagement information that can help bring employees and employers together and shape a positive future of work where we can all grow together.

So what are you about to read about?

If the number of social media followers is a proxy for influence, I will start by mentioning happiness quotes from three of the most followed people in the world on Instagram. Let's take a look at what Oprah Winfrey, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Kylie Jenner say about happiness:

Making other people happy is what brings me happiness. I have a blessed life, and I have always shared my life's gifts with others. I will continue to use my voice and my life as a catalyst for encouraging people to help make a difference in the lives of others.

—Oprah Winfrey

It's to have my family and my friends and to try to be the most happy person in the world.

—Cristiano Ronaldo

Happiness is a choice, not a result. Nothing will make you happy until you choose to be happy. No person will make you happy unless you decide to be happy.

—Kylie Jenner

Great quotes, but they are really a summary of three individuals' lived experiences that are very different from the billions of other people on this Earth.

HAPPINESS IS IN FASHION

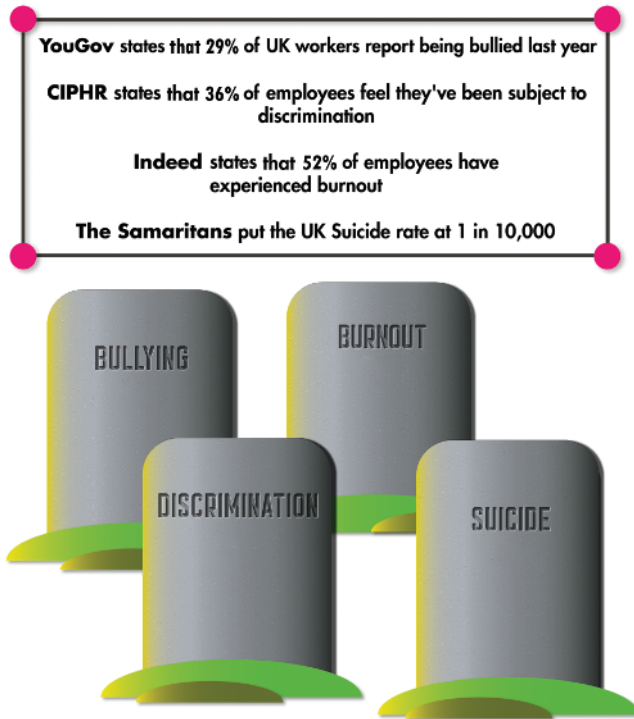
Celebrities aren't the only ones who have been discussing happiness recently.

The world of work has suddenly started embracing employee happiness like a shiny, cool new thing to talk about to drive performance. If it was the 1980s, the switchboard would be going off just like at the *Ghostbusters* HQ. "*Ghostbusters hotline, how can we help you?*"

Over the last few years, it has become fashionable to talk about employee happiness. But at the same time, for some reason people have started talking less about employee engagement. My company had a small part to play in that but I don't think we were the only reason.

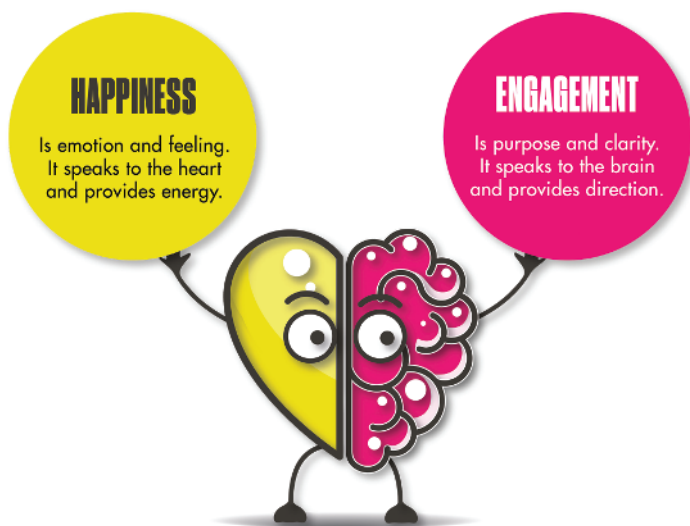
To ignore employee engagement is as dangerous as ignoring employee happiness has been for the last 30 years.

This increased interest in happiness is more likely coming from the symptoms of ignoring our human needs, the consequences of which are record levels of workplace bullying,¹ career burnout,² employee discrimination,³ and suicide.⁴



Why is this happening? Simply rebranding employee engagement as employee happiness is not the answer. Employee engagement and happiness are now two very different areas. Just as different species evolved on Darwin's Galápagos Islands, employee engagement and employee happiness have evolved separately over time and focus on very different areas.

Clive Hyland, the head of neuroscience at The Happiness Index, describes employee engagement as what our brain needs and employee happiness as what our heart needs to thrive at work.



Both are equally important.

Going back to the academic definition of happiness or subjective well-being, the London School of Economics describes it as “How people think and feel about their lives and their everyday experiences.” I really like this definition.

We describe engagement as what our brains think about our work and happiness as what our heart feels about work. But what does that actually mean, and what insight can we learn from the latest data?

To succeed in work and in life, we need to reconnect our brain with our heart. The data in this book can help you do that.

Many professionals use a social media tool called LinkedIn; a quick skim will reveal business professionals either sharing happiness quotes that inspire them or sharing advice on how to build a strong work culture. Don't get me wrong, these quotes

are interesting, but we must remember that a quote is often based on one individual's lived experience. By all means be inspired, but don't fall into a trap of thinking that the quote is representative or should be followed like a map in your organization. Some of these quotes are repeated so much that they become taken as fact despite having no more data behind them than one influential person's point of view.

In this book, we move from individual perspectives on happiness to universal human truths so you can learn about what makes people tick.

DATA IS SIMPLY THE PLURAL OF ANECDOTE

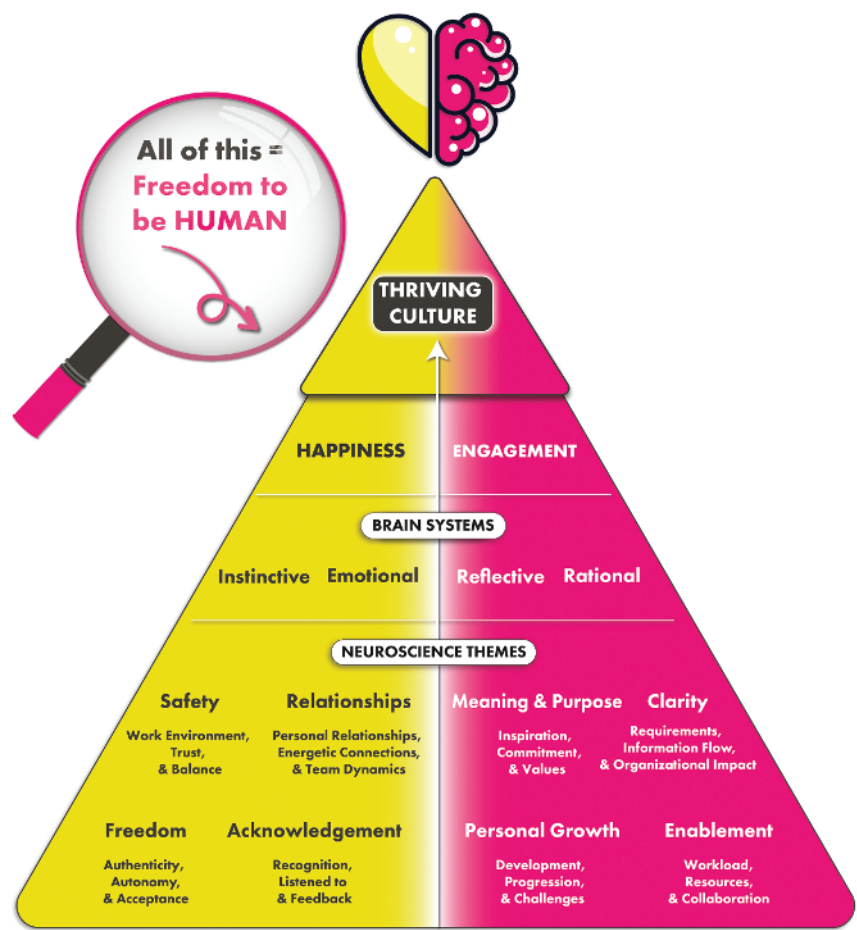
Data is one tiny anecdote from one moment in time. When you combine all of these anecdotes into one dataset, you can start to learn about human behavior.

This book shares with you the data and insight gathered from over 2 million employees in over 100 countries. I also use research from 223,561 happiness and engagement external research studies, 24 in-depth expert interviews, and a deeper qualitative sample of 22,000 employees.

The amount of data and research can be quite overwhelming, so in each of the core eight chapters, I break this down and point you toward the key information to start your learning journey:

- Full descriptions of each happiness and engagement driver
- Live examples from organizations on the front line
- Key data shared from The Happiness Index dataset
- Featured external research
- Expert opinions from specialists on each of the 24 sub-drivers (see the image that follows)

I also provide you with a further research reading list in the bibliography for those eager to delve deeper. Note that the customers are all anonymous because their culture work is ongoing and all of them are working hard every day to create the conditions for their employees to thrive.



I must also point out that this data is collected from some of the most forward-thinking companies in the world. Companies that don't care about employee happiness simply don't work with the pink-and-yellow company called The Happiness Index.

The reason I share this is that you are about to start delving into data that is at an incredibly high benchmark. If we had data from all the organizations in the world, I think the picture would be much bleaker.

As stated, our customers still have plenty of unhappy employees; the only difference is they are prepared to do something about it.

We are now going to take a dive deep into the human condition and something we call the *freedom to be human*. What does this phrase actually mean? Is it a marketing slogan, like Nike's "Just do it"?

Freedom to be human means to be happy and engaged at work. Traditionally, companies want engaged employees and employees want to be happy. This book explores how neither side needs to compromise. It shows you how happy and engaged employees are a win-win for employees and organizations across the globe.

Thank you for picking up this book. I hope you enjoy it.

Notes

1. According to Trades Union Congress, nearly a third of people are bullied at work, <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/nearly-third-people-are-bullied-work-says-tuc>
2. <https://uk.indeed.com/lead/preventing-employee-burnout-report>
3. <https://www.ciphr.com/workplace-discrimination-statistics/>
4. <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/suicide-facts-and-figures/latest-suicide-data/>

